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## Orange City Tulip Festival: Through the Years

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## Orange City Tulip Festival Through the Years

Written by Arie Vander Stoep in the publication *Tulip Festival History*

Records of events leading up to Orange City's first Tulip Festival are rather meager and indefinite. The Hollanders' innate tendency toward cleanliness and beauty combined with a historical background of flower culture is an acceptable although abstract motivating force. This force found physical expression as early as 1933 when it was recorded that in addition to the large number of tulip plantings already in existence in Orange City, some 50,000 more bulbs were imported and planted by the townspeople. Combining the tulip planting project with the organized efforts of the Orange City Chamber of Commerce, the ground work was laid for the beginning of the now nationally publicized Tulip Festival in 1936.

Accounts of activities in the April and May 1936 issues of the *Sioux County Capital* indicate that the first festival, May 14, featured a parade, costume contest, LeMars Drum and Bugle Corps, Better Homes and Gardens photographers staff, The Friesian Society Sing, window displays of Holland momentos, American Legion concessions, Northwestern Junior College Chorus and Orange City High School band, and in the evening, a concert by the Sioux City Symphony Orchestra.

The outstanding innovation of the 1937 festival was the election and coronation of the first Tulip Queen, Elizabeth Top (Swets). The next year an elaborate and formal coronation ceremony was introduced into the program, involving not only the Queen and her attendants but a score or more of additional personnel as guards, ushers, trumpeters, etc. Ceremonial functions have, throughout the twenty-five years, been carried out by City Officials and Iowa's Vice Council for The Netherlands, also a local citizen. With minor changes this ceremony is still considered one of the most colorful and impressive attractions of the festival.

Because of the public interest in the Tulip Festival and the consequential large crowds attending, 1938 marked the first year of two day festivities. The entire program of activities was repeated each day and on each evening. "In Dutch," a Musical Comedy in two acts, locally composed and cast, was staged at the City Auditorium.